## **Iowa's Deafblind Services Project**

# Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

# 1. What is the Iowa's Deafblind Service Project?

The **lowa's Deafblind Service Project** provides technical assistance through training efforts and the dissemination of information on research and promising practices for purposes of educating infants, toddlers, children and youth who are deafblind, birth through 21.

## 2. What can the Project offer educators, families, and children?

The Project receives federal dollars via a grant application to provide technical assistance and staff development opportunities. Available services include:

- Technical assistance and consultation to educators, families and children based on individual needs and requests.
- Provision of staff development opportunities for teachers, paraprofessionals, and support service personnel.
- Dissemination of current information regarding deafblindness.

# 3. Who may request services?

- Families of infants, toddlers, children and youth with deaf- blindness.
- School district, area education agency or other agency personnel providing services to infants, toddlers, children and youth who are deafblind.

## 4. Do I have to pay for these services?

Services are provided at no cost to families, school districts, area education agencies, and other agencies requesting service.

#### 5. Who is eligible for services?

Infants, toddlers, children and youth ages birth through 21 who are deafblind.

#### 6. How is deafblindness defined?

It may seem that deafblindness refers to a total inability to see or hear. However, in reality deafblindness is a condition in which there is a combination of visual and hearing impairments along a continuum. Many children called deafblind have enough vision to be able to move about in their environments, recognize familiar people, see sign language at close distances, and perhaps read large print. Others have sufficient hearing to recognize familiar sounds, understand some speech, or develop speech themselves. The range of sensory impairments included in the term "deafblindness" is great.

Section 622 of the Individuals for Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines deaf- blindness as "children and youth having auditory and visual impairments, the combination of which creates such severe communication and other developmental and learning needs that they cannot be appropriately educated without special education and related services, beyond those that would be provided solely for children with hearing impairments, visual impairments, or severe disabilities, to address their education needs due to these concurrent disabilities." This definition includes all children birth through age 21.

Some people are deafblind from birth. Others may be born deaf or hard-ofhearing, but lose some or all of these senses as a result of accident or illness.

Still others may be born with both sight and hearing, but lose some or all of these senses as a result of accident or illness.

Again, it is important to note that the majority of learners who are deafblind have some residual use of either or both of the distance senses -- vision and hearing. Other learners may have no usable vision or hearing. Some may have additional challenges, including physical, cognitive, and emotional disabilities. Although learners who are deafblind are a heterogeneous population, they all share communication challenges and the potential isolating effects of combined vision and hearing losses.

Deaf blindness is not the sum total of a vision loss plus a hearing loss. The combination of these sensory losses, to whatever degree, or in combination with additional disabilities, creates highly unique challenges. Vision and hearing interrelate to connect people with the world and are the primary avenues through which most people learn.

# 7. Do the terms deafblind and dual sensory impaired mean the same thing?

Yes, in lowa the terms mean the same thing. However, it is important to mention that when one uses the term "dual-sensory" that it specifically refers to the vision and hearing senses.

# 8. Who qualifies as being deafblind (dual sensory impaired)?

Beside the definition mentioned in IDEA, the Project has developed guidelines to assist individuals in the decision-making process. These guidelines are found in the Deafblind Census Form.

#### 9. What is the Deafblind Census?

Each state is required to maintain a list of eligible children who meet the requirements of being deafblind. Federal law requires this Census. The maintenance of this census is tied in part, to the amount of federal dollars the Project can receive by grant application to provide technical assistance and staff development opportunities for educators and families.

#### 10. Who can refer children to the Census?

Anyone using the census form can refer a child to the Project. Educators, family members, community agency personnel, health care professionals, and others are prime sources of referrals. Families usually learn about the census and Project through the school system or Area Education Agency.

# 11. Does a multi-disciplinary team need to label a child "deafblind" before referring him or her to the Census?

**No!** A child at the local level can be referred to the census with a non-categorical or other disability label.

# 12. Should a child who wears glasses and a hearing aid and is in a general education classroom be referred to the Census?

**No!** The IDEA definition states that a child must have both an auditory and visual impairment, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and education problems that he/she cannot properly be accommodated in special education programs either for the hearing impaired or the visually impaired child.

Referrals to the census should only be made for those students receiving specially designed instruction and support services from special education.

# 13. Should a child who is multiply disabled and functioning as if they were deaf (but hearing tests show there is no hearing loss) be referred to the census?

**No!** The child must have at least a 30-45 decibel hearing loss as measured by pure tone average (PTA) for the better ear.

### 14. Is parent permission required for referral to the Census?

Not by Federal law, but parental permission is required for technical assistance prior to the development of an IFSP or IEP.

# 15. As a parent or professional, why should I place a child's name on the Census?

So families/professionals can be assured that their child/student receives appropriate services from educators and other service personnel.

Education for an infant, child or youth with deafblindness needs to be highly individualized; the limited channels available for learning necessitate organizing a program for each child that will address the child's unique ways of learning and his or her own interests. Assessment is crucial at every step of the way. Sensory deficits can easily mislead even experienced educators into underestimating (or occasionally overestimating) intelligence and constructing inappropriate programs.

Helen Keller said, "Blindness separates a person from things, but deafness separates him from people." This potential isolation is one important reason why it is necessary to engage the services of persons familiar with the combination of both blindness and deafness when planning an educational program for a child who is deafblind. Doing so will help a child or youth with these disabilities receive an education which maximizes her or his potential for learning and for meaningful contact with her or his environment. The earlier these services can be obtained, the better for the child.

# 16. Once placed on the Census, can a child's name be removed?

Yes! The Census is updated on a yearly basis. If a child has moved out-of-state or no longer qualifies as being "deafblind," he or she can be removed from the Census.

Infants and toddlers can be referred to the Census on a conditional basis particularly if vision and hearing tests are inconclusive or if the child is not vision and hearing impaired at the present time but, has a known syndrome which will eventually lead to vision and hearing loss.

# 17. What about confidentiality of Census information?

This reporting process completely complies with Federal Regulation 99.31, which permits the disclosure of information about persons on the Census to federal, state, and local agencies without parental consent.

# 18. How is this program funded?

This is a federally funded program. I.D.E.A., Part C, Section 622; Title 34 CFR, Part 307.

# 19. Who can I call if I have questions about the Census or need to access assistance from the Project?

By emailing, writing or calling: Karen E. Blankenship, Project Director

> Grimes State Office Building Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0146 515/281-7972

E-mail: Karen.Blankenship@iowa.gov

-or-

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